I was conferring with business colleagues on how we as leaders of today can transform the next generation. Were there any differences between the sexes in leadership qualities, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats? … Oh dear, you must be thinking –she’s not opening the old Pandora’s Box on the Battle of the Sexes again!

I really do not want to go there! What I intend to do is to provoke some thoughts and feelings around these differences so we may harness any obvious advantages and to learn from the disadvantages. Women/Men, Venus/Mars, Yin/Yang ….. they exist in Nature neither as good nor bad, they just are. So let’s see what we can be grateful for in understanding our women or men leaders, their yin & yang leadership styles (as I choose to call them), and the challenges they may face (regardless which planet they hail from!).

Equality of the Sexes?

According to the American Dental Association’s Health Policy Resources Center in Chicago, Brown & Lazar analyzed the mean net income of a cohort of male and female dentists with similar demographics and practice characteristics. The authors, who
published their paper in 1998, found that the average net income of these male dentists is higher than it is for their female counterparts. This difference is statistically significant and monotonically tangible, amounting to an annual net income balance of about $26,000 (22 percent) in favor of male dentists.

Differences exist between male and female dental practitioners in the positions they occupy within employment hierarchies, according to a study published in the British Dental Journal in 2000. British female dental practitioners occupy lower positions in the employment hierarchies of the Community Dental Service and the Hospital Dental Service. Women general dental practitioners are significantly less likely to be sole proprietor of, or a partner in, a general practice. Ownership of a general practice is related to: sex, age, number of years qualified, number of children, and hours worked. Consultants in the Hospital Dental Service are more likely to be male, older, to have been qualified longer and (obviously) to hold more additional qualifications than their non-consultant colleagues. Senior Dental Officers and Directors of the Community Dental Service are more likely to be male, work longer hours and (again obviously) to hold more additional qualifications than Community Dental Officers.

Suppose you could eliminate the factors often blamed for the shortage of women in high-paying jobs. Suppose that promotions and raises did not depend on pleasing sexist male bosses or putting in long nights and weekends away from home. Would women make as much as men?

**The Pittsburgh Experiment**

Economists recently tried to find out in an experiment in Pittsburgh by paying men and women to add up five numbers in their heads. At first they worked individually, doing as many sums as they could in five minutes and receiving 50 cents for each correct answer. Then they competed in four-person tournaments, with the winner getting $2 per correct answer and the losers getting nothing.

On average, the women made as much as the men under either system. But when they were offered a choice for the next round - take the piece rate or compete in a tournament - most women declined to compete, even the ones who had done the best in the earlier rounds. Most men chose the tournament, even the ones who had done the worst.

The men's eagerness partly stemmed from overconfidence, because on average men rated their ability more highly than the women rated theirs. But interviews and further experiments convinced the researchers, Muriel Niederle of Stanford and Lise Vesterlund of the University of Pittsburgh, that the gender gap wasn't due mainly to women's
insecurities about their abilities. It was due to different appetites for competition.

"Even in tasks where they do well, women seem to shy away from competition, whereas men seem to enjoy it too much," Professor Niederle said. "The men who weren't good at this task lost a little money by choosing to compete, and the really good women passed up a lot of money by not entering tournaments they would have won."

You can argue that this difference is due to social influences, although I suspect it's largely innate, a byproduct of evolution and testosterone. Whatever the cause, it helps explain why men set up the traditional corporate ladder as one continual winner-take-all competition - and why that structure no longer makes sense.

### Competition vs Cooperation

Now that so many employees (and more than half of young college/university graduates) are women, running a business like a tournament alienates some of the most talented workers and potential executives or practice partners. It also induces competition in situations where cooperation makes more sense.

The result is not good for the bottom line, as demonstrated by a study from the Catalyst research organization showing that large companies yield better returns to stockholders if they have more women in senior management. Imagine how it could be for your profit margins if there were more women partners in your practice….

A friend of mine, a businessman who buys companies, told me one of the first things he looks at is the gender of the boss.

"The companies run by women are much more likely to survive," he said. "The typical guy who starts a company is a competitive, charismatic leader - he's always the firm's top salesman - but if he leaves he takes his loyal followers with him and the company goes downhill. Women C.E.O.'s know how to hire good salespeople and create a healthy culture within the company. Plus they don't spend 20 percent of their time in strip clubs."

Have you got a woman CEO in your organization?

### What women want

Still, for all the executive talents that women have, for all the changes that are happening in the corporate world, there will always be some jobs that women, on average, will not
want as badly as men do. Some of the best-paying jobs require crazed competition and the willingness to risk big losses - going broke, never seeing your family and friends, dying young.

The women in the experiment who didn't want to bother with a five-minute tournament are not likely to relish spending 16 hours a day on a Wall Street trading floor. It's not fair to deny women a chance at those jobs, but it's not realistic to expect that they'll seek them in the same numbers that men will.

For two decades, academics crusading for equality in the workplace have been puzzled by surveys showing that women are at least as satisfied with their jobs and their pay as men are. This is known as "the paradox of the contented female worker."

But maybe it's not such a paradox after all. Maybe women, like the ones who shunned the experimental tournament, know they could make more money in some jobs but also know they wouldn't enjoy competing for it as much as their male rivals. They realize, better than men, that in life there's a lot more at stake than money.

**Women vs Men Leadership styles**

According to a new study comparing leadership styles (specifically focusing on personal qualities and motivational factors) of women and men conducted by Caliper, a Princeton-based management consulting firm, which has assessed the potential of more than two million applicants and employees for over 25,000 companies around the world, and Aurora, a London-based organization which advances women and comprises a 20,000 member businesswomen’s network, women leaders are more assertive, persuasive, have stronger need to get things done and are willing to take risks than male leaders.

Women leaders are also found to be more empathetic, flexible and possessed stronger interpersonal skills than their male counterparts. “These qualities combine to create a leadership style that is inclusive, open, consensus building, collaborative and collegial,” according to Herb Greenberg, PhD, President and CEO of Caliper.

“We should emphasize that male leaders in this study were exceptional in these areas. But women leaders set a new standard,” adds Dr Greenberg.

**What is an effective leader?**
While scores of executives and academicians have weighed in on what it takes to be an effective leader, a participant of this study, Connie Jackson, Chief Executive of St. Bartholomew’s & the Royal London Charitable Foundation, provided an excellent working definition:

“Strong leadership starts with being able to pull together a group of people – who may not have anything in common – and getting them to buy into a vision of themselves as a collective group who can achieve uncommon results.”

So what did the Caliper Report distinguish with regard to my so-called yin & yang leadership styles in women & men respectively?

**The Caliper Report findings**

1. **Women leaders are more persuasive than their male counterparts**

In interpreting the first quality of the yin leadership style, strong people skills enable women leaders to read a situation accurately and take in information from all sides – enhancing their persuasive ability. They zero in on someone’s objections or concerns, weigh them appropriately, assess them effectively and incorporate them into the grander scheme of things when appropriate. These women leaders are able to bring others around to their own point of view or alter their own point of view – depending upon the circumstances and information they uncover. They can do this because they genuinely understand and care about where others are coming from. This allows them to come at a subject from their audience’s perspective, so that the people they are leading fell more understood, supported and valued. This natural tendency of yin leaders to apply the multiple perspectives Wisdom Training (refer article in [http://www.dryvonnesum.com/pdf/The_Magic_of_Wisdom_Training-NLP.pdf](http://www.dryvonnesum.com/pdf/The_Magic_of_Wisdom_Training-NLP.pdf)) make them invaluable as managers.

In contrast, the yang style of leadership tended to be more self focused. “The male leaders we’ve studied have a tendency to start from their point of view,” explains Dr Greenberg. “And because they are not as flexible or willing to interact with others, the male leaders may tend to force their perspective and convince through the strength of their position… rather than actually persuading. The male leaders we studied run the risk of not necessarily convincing people to agree with them so much as pushing for their point of view.”

2. **Feeling the sting of rejection, learning from adversity and carrying on with an “I’ll show you” attitude**
Women will feel the sting of set back. “They may even dwell on it, and tend to be a little self-critical,” Dr Greenberg explains. “But then they will muster their assertiveness, shake off any negative feelings. Learn what they need to carry on and a voice in the back of their heads will say, “I’ll show you.”

“Whenever I’ve made a mistake,” said Libby Sartain, Senior Vice President of Human Resources at Yahoo! Inc., “I may be hard on myself initially, but then I shake off and figure out how to get beyond the situation. I don’t let it undermine my confidence. In fact, sometimes when my back is against the wall, the best in me comes out.”

“Essentially, when a woman has the talent and the ambition to move ahead, yet she receives signals – subtle or overt – that others think she will not make the grade, this can fuel her ambition further,” adds Dr Greenberg.

I wonder if the glass ceiling can inadvertently be created to drive yin leaders upwards….

3. An inclusive leadership style of problem solving and decision making

Interestingly, women leaders were lower than their male counterparts in thoroughness. Women leaders studied were more interested in hearing all points of view, then making the best possible decision. The final decision did not necessarily have to be the initial point of view. They were able to read situations accurately and take in information from all sides, then make the most informed decision possible.

The difference in yin & yang leadership styles starts with listening. Not just listening to firm your answer, but really listening, learning, reflecting, then implementing a plan that incorporates the best of everyone’s ideas.

This inclusive style of yin leadership is based on open lines of communication, according to Susan Rice, Chief Executive of Lloyds TSB Scotland. She says, “To learn you have to keep asking. It’s all about asking questions. I am always asking questions. What the people I work will say is that the process of my asking them questions helps to clarify their own thinking and they actually come out a little sharper. That takes a lot of trust. My job, as I see it, is to set a clear strategy, ask the right questions, and encourage our managers to be experts in their business.”

Because women leaders are more willing to share information, they will also talk decisions through with many more people than their male counterparts.
In a busy practice, the opportunity to communicate amongst team members drop dramatically. However, it seems like the yin leader still finds the time to make crucial connections.

Dr Greenberg speculates, “This inclusive style of leadership, incorporating facts and perspectives from as many sources as possible, positions women leaders ideally for the future, as the information age continues to evolve.”

4. Women leaders are more likely to ignore rules and take risks

Women leaders are more likely to push back if they are overly bound by regulations and rules, engage in more risk taking and come up with innovative solutions.

“As a leader,” Connie Jackson professes, “there are times you need to risk going in a direction that no one else has ever taken before. You just have to step out there and follow the path you think is right.”

Yin leaders tend to have a greater need to get things done than yang leaders and are less likely to hesitate or focus on the small details.

So take note yin leaders – go make a mark with your pioneering spirit!

Dr Greenberg says, “Women leaders are venturesome, less interested in what has been than in what can be. They will run the risk of occasionally being wrong in order to get things done. And with their fine abstract reasoning skills, they learn from any mistakes and carry on.”

Are women creating a new paradigm of leadership?

The answer may be “yes”.

“So much of what it takes to be a leader has been historically defined by men, “explains Libby Sartain. “And while I was determined to be a leader, the last thing in the world I was going to do was to try to be a man so that I could be taken seriously. I have to continue to be myself and create a leadership style that worked for me. I’m just not capable of being anyone other than who I am.”

This study provided preliminary evidence that women bring distinct personality and motivational strengths to leadership. They have an open, consensus-building, collegial approach to leading.
Dr Greenberg adds, “These women leaders share a strong profile. They are assertive, persuasive, empathic, willing to take risks, outgoing, flexible and have a need to get things done.”

He concludes, “These personality qualities combine to create a leadership profile that is more conducive to today’s diverse workplace, where information is shared freely, collaboration is vital and teamwork distinguishes the best companies.”

“Jeanette Lichner, Managing Director, Bank of America, says “The strong leadership profile exhibited by these women on both sides of the Atlantic points to the future. The female view that we strengthen ourselves by strengthening others is redefining leadership.”

**What this means for us**

Regardless of which style is your preference, let me invite you to become more aware of how you can use your strengths to your advantage (and those of whom you lead). Yin leadership does not solely have to be distinctly for women. Perhaps we can learn from both the yin and the yang: so that a balanced leadership style embraces the qualities of both. Awareness creates choice, permitting appropriate qualities to be applied in different contexts.

I believe it is this understanding that will allow yin & yang leadership to be the complementary styles by which we can not only develop ourselves, but to transform leaders of tomorrow today.

**Bibliography**


Newton, J.T., Thorogood, N., Gibbons, D.E. A Study of the career development of male & female dental practitioners, BDJ, 2000 Jan:188 (2)


Caliper Report The Qualities that distinguish Women Leaders. 2005

Sum, Yvonne The Magic of Wisdom Training. Dental Asia, June 2003

About the Author: Dr Yvonne Sum is a pioneer in Parent Leadership coaching. She is on a quest to co-create joyful learning partnerships between parents and children to simultaneously bring out each other’s authentic best. She is about parents learning from our children mirroring to us what we most need to learn about ourselves and vice-versa. Through her program Transformational Leadership Challenge™ (TLC), Dr Sum is committed to transform leaders of tomorrow today by highlighting family values and celebrating parents as role models and heroes in life who proactively unleash our children’s potential through self actualization, intentional living and powerful leadership centred on love and high purpose. She expresses this passion to bring out our authentic best through her roles as an international speaker, writer, transformational corporate facilitator, executive and parent Meta-Coach, Neuro Linguistic Programming trainer, business woman, wife and mother. Please visit www.dryvonnesum.com for more information.